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Ethiopia's history and historiography in perspective: a post-modernist critique and policy implications for national cohesion

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ABSTRACT

Ethiopia's history is deeply rooted and intertwined in the country's polarized politics, leading to a complex and contested historical landscape and interpretation. This has resulted in rival historiographical perspectives and contradictions between Ethio-nationalist and ethno nationalist schools. The positivistic meta-narrative of Ethiopian historiography held by the Ethio nationalists argues that the postmodernist approach espoused by the ethno nationalists threatens the grand narrative of Ethiopian history and challenges the objectivity of history as a scientific discipline. This article aims to expose and criticize these fallacies and contradictions in Ethiopianist historical metanarratives. A qualitative explorative case study design was used to gather data from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were interviews with purposely-selected eight key informants representing varying historical perspectives. The secondary sources include content analysis from documents, established literature, and social media. Content and thematic analyses were used for data interpretation and generalization. The study found that foreign writers' perspectives, Ethio-nationalist perspectives, ethno-nationalist perspectives, and successive Ethiopian regimes' historiographical perspectives have contributed to Ethiopia's historiographical contradictions. This has entangled the historical debate with national-level political debate, negatively influencing national reconciliation and cohesion. The article recommends policy implications to enhance national cohesion through historical deconstruction, reinterpretation, and inclusivity of marginalized voices through new historicism.

IMPACT STATEMENT

Ethiopia's history is a complex and multifaceted subject that has been shaped by various biases and perspectives. This article highlights the significance of understanding Ethiopia's elitist and essentialist historical narrative and its impact on national unity. Traditional, aka mainstream, Ethiopian historiography has often presented a one-sided narrative that favours certain groups or ideologies, leading to a distorted understanding of Ethiopia's past. This positivist Ethiopianist historiography has been challenged by the ethnonationalist elites and historians who have been calling for the need to rewrite Ethiopia's history with the objective of including the history and contribution of 'others' in the history of the Ethiopian state. By adopting a post-modernist critique, we can uncover these biases and strive for a more balanced and inclusive interpretation of Ethiopia's history from a perspective of change and continuity. This approach helps the wider 'subaltern studies' and nationally contributes to sustainable state-building, national reconciliation, peace-building, and national cohesion.

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1. Introduction

In Ethiopia, history and historiography are controversial subjects that have divided Ethiopia's competing political elites into two conflicting camps: Ethio-nationalist and ethno-nationalist. Ethiopia's state-building endeavour that disregards and fails to address the contested nature of Ethiopia's history and historiography would end up short of addressing the problems associated with Ethiopia's state formation and

building process. The question of how to deal with Ethiopia's past and its historiography has been one of the controversial issues that beset contemporary Ethiopia's state-building, national reconciliation, and cohesion. Having a national and official version of Ethiopian history and historiography is still an unsettled debate, polarizing Ethiopia's competing elites into opposing camps mentioned above.

This article focuses on the historical and historiographical contradictions and debates between pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist historiographical traditions. The former argues that the postmodern approach of the latter has posed an existential threat to the mainstream and positivist nationalist historiographical tradition (Tesfaye, 2019). The main controversy lies in the historical understanding, interpretation, and reinterpretation of Ethiopia's territorial expansion and state formation process that took place during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In this respect, the contribution of the northerners (Semites) to Ethiopia's state formation and expansion has been studied exhaustively both by domestic and foreign scholars. Surprisingly, little attention has been paid to the history of non-Semites, categorically the south (Hailu, 2021, p. 34; Yates, 2017, p. 104), which makes Ethiopia's history an incomplete one (Yusuf, 2009). Given this, the ethno-nationalist historiographical tradition endeavours to fill up this lacuna; though, it is being challenged and suspected by pan-Ethiopianist scholars and historians as a present and imminent danger to the established and continuity of Ethiopianist historiographical tradition.

Tesfaye, in his article 'The Predicaments of the 'Grand Narrative' of Ethiopian History: The Challenges of Postmodernism' (2019), argues that Ethiopian ethnic nationalists' quest for representation and revisiting Ethiopia's history is a contest for 'attention or readership' (Tesfaye, 2019, p. 11). He argues that postmodernism has provided an ideological tool for the ethno-nationalist camp, which lacks concern for the continuity and harmony of Ethiopia's history. However, this article argues that the Ethiopianist or modernist school's position, focusing on historical objectivity and continuity, does not address Ethiopia's historical issues or solve existing historiographical debates meaningfully. Moreover, the lack of consensus on addressing Ethiopia's historiographical issues through various methodological approaches undermines the issue. This article suggests postmodernist historiography as a solution to Ethiopia's historiographical contradictions and its policy implications for national cohesion. Ethiopia's competing ethnic nationalists have been questioning the hitherto history and historiography of Ethiopia. The ethno-nationalists' perception resulted from the essentialist, modernist, and exclusionist historiography that has relegated the history and contribution of others (Duressa & Geleta, 2021; Ta'a, 2006) since they are not appropriate to the Ethiopianist perspective (Hultin, 1996, p. 90). This has further intensified Ethiopia's historiographical debate and contradiction that have not sought proper attention so far. Given the contending historiographical perspectives, the challenges lie in striking a balance between the ethno-nationalist and Ethiopianist historical perspectives while keeping the interest of the periphery and promoting a shared national Ethiopian history that best helps for national reconciliation, healing, and fostering national cohesion. Building on the theoretical and epistemological tenets of postmodernism, this article aims to resolve this historiographical stalemate. The article argues that a postmodernist historiographical approach would provide a practical solution to help ease the Ethiopian historical tension and contradiction. Furthermore, the postmodernist historiography not only serves as a guarantor for the diversity and continuity of Ethiopia's history but also contributes to national cohesion.

The study poses the following questions: What are the missing elements in the nationalist and Ethiopianist historiographical perspectives? To what extent do modernist and exclusionist Ethiopian historiography influence ethno-nationalist perceptions and the fragmentation of national identity and cohesion? What are the misperceptions of the ethno-nationalist historiography that challenge national unity? How can a post-modernist critique pave the way for a more cohesive understanding of Ethiopian history? What role does post-modernist historiography play in challenging, deconstructing, and reshaping dominant power structures and narratives embedded within Ethiopia's history and historiography? What are the key post-modernist policy implications of embracing a more inclusive and pluralistic approach to Ethiopian historiography aimed at fostering national cohesion? How can these influence policy decisions in promoting inclusivity and unity in the realm of Ethiopian history?

The objective of this piece of writing is neither a direct assault on the positivistic and Ethio-nationalist camp nor a revisionist approach to the prevailing mainstream Ethiopian historiography. However, it is an academic endeavour and criticism to locate lacunas in Ethiopia's modernist historiography, which claims truth,

totality, hegemony, and legitimacy, in the realm of Ethiopia's historical knowledge production and continuity, which the ethno nationalist historiography challenges since it peripheralizes the other. Thus, the main objective of the article is threefold. First, as an academic endeavour, it discloses Ethiopia's competing historiographical understandings, perspectives, and debates. Second, it positions the significance of postmodernist historiography as the way out of the problem. Thirdly, it tries to point out the policy implications and contribution of postmodernist historiography for national cohesion. Hence, the article is important in its call for the contribution of postmodernist historiography, which aims to include the history of marginalized societies. In this regard, it ponders how to write, interpret, and read the history of Ethiopia from a perspective of change and continuity and the quest for inclusion and representation of the subaltern. Finally, the research could also motivate researchers to investigate more regarding the contribution of postmodernist historiography and methodological approaches by bringing interdisciplinary fields into their study of subaltern groups who have been suppressed or marginalized by the dominant epistemological approaches.

2. Materials and methods

The study used a qualitative exploratory case study design to identify the major historical contradictions and perspectives of Ethiopian history and historiography. The data were gathered from both primary and secondary sources. Eight key informants were identified using purposive sampling for the interview. The informants, representing distinct historical perspectives, were drawn from political parties, activists, and academics. The study participants' data were recorded, transcribed, and reported using anonymous names to maintain privacy and safety. Published and unpublished documents, dissertations, and scientific articles, media outlets, and web sources were also duly consulted as secondary sources. The data and content analysis from secondary sources helped to identify and corroborate the basic historical contradictions in Ethiopia as identified by research participants and the literature. Moreover, social media platforms and their contents were also used as sources of data. Finally, the data were analysed through content and thematic analysis using critical discourse analysis (CDA) that is aligned with a postmodern theoretical approach, which informed data analysis, interpretation, generalization, discussion, and policy recommendations.

2.1. Ensuring validity and reliability of the research

Great effort was made to ensure content validity and reliability while making sure that the key informants selected by the purposive sampling truly represent Ethiopia's contending historiographical perspectives under study. This helped to ensure content validity and reliability. The other mechanism used to ensure content validity and reliability is setting clear research questions that address Ethiopia's hitherto historiographical contradictions and perspectives leading to the way out of the problem. This has guided for whom to ask and what kind of data need to be gathered that align with the objective of the study. Research participants' political perspectives, profession, position and ethnic background were also used as selection criteria to identify potential informants deemed relevant for the qualitative study. This has ensured gathering data that reflect the contending historical perspectives of the Ethiopian state. Finally, expert opinion was used to review the sampling strategy and the data gathered through purposive sampling method. Hence, it can be concluded and assured that through the above-mentioned methods, the validity and reliability of the research can lead to consistency and repeatability of the findings.

3. Literature review

3.1. Understanding Ethiopia's history and historiography

History is a record of the wars of the world, a nation, which has no history, that is no wars is a happy nation¹

—Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948)

Ethiopia's past is full of wars, confrontations, and subjugations, whether internal or external, which Ethiopianist scholars refer to as the nation's glorious history. However, the glorious past left many

Ethiopian nations and nationalities saddened, apart from the victorious. Consequently, Ethiopians lack a sacred history book and are discontent with their past. Ethiopia's history, especially its modern history, has been the root of deep-rooted hostility, contradictions, interpretations, and reinterpretations. This has divided the competing Ethiopian elites into various factions: northerners versus southerners, Semitic versus Cushitic, Ethiopianist versus ethno-nationalist and positivists versus post-positivists.

Ethiopia's contested history has been part and parcel of Ethiopia's competing elites' political conflict, rooted in varied understandings of the country's state formation process. These rival Ethiopian elites, especially the Amhara, Oromo, and Tigrayans, have their versions of historical understandings and interpretations. Ethiopia's Historical interpretations encompass both glorious pasts and sensitive stories of violence, victimhood, socio-economic, and political oppression perpetrated by one against the other (Gudina, 2004). The ethno-nationalist camp has been calling for acknowledgment, reconciliation, and redressing of the past with the very purpose of producing a comprehensive Ethiopian national history that ensures democracy, equality, and mutual trust. It also argues that a new and inclusive historical narrative would bring stability and national cohesion. However, the quest for an inclusive national history has been met with suspicion by the pan-Ethiopianist historiography.

Understanding Ethiopia's historical contradictions requires exploring the source of these contradictions and disagreements. Regarding Ethiopia's history, Christopher Clapham (2009, p. 181) observes that Ethiopia's 'crises of governance' are ingrained in the lengthy and uneven history of the country, leading to bottlenecks manifested in internal tensions and the preservation of the state in a politically and socially fragile, conflict-ridden sub-region. Sorenson (1992, p. 227) also notes that the past is 'a contested terrain' where it is 'selectively remembered or conveniently forgotten, sometimes invented, and can justify and legitimize present action, providing a model for the future to be created according to tradition'. As Sorenson aptly describes, Ethiopia is a place where several rival actors compete for power, supremacy, legitimacy, and the pursuit of happiness, making Ethiopia's history one of the unresolved issues among rival Ethiopian elites concerning Ethiopia's national history.

The debate regarding Ethiopia's historiography begins with the inception of the Ethiopian state itself.² Pan-Ethiopianist elites, historians, and their historiography trace Ethiopia's history back to the ancient period. They argue that Ethiopia and its history have existed for the past three thousand years (Kebede, 2003; Tibebe, 1995; Zewde, 2002). These scholars present a continuous socio-cultural and political tradition connected to the Axumite civilization that began around 800 BC. Furthermore, they emphasize the continuous existence of the Ethiopian state, its unity, cultural identity/uniformity, and glorious colonial resistance (Zewde, 2002). The pan-Ethiopianist, also known as unionist, camp strongly argues that this is a sufficient reason to create a common identity, pan-Ethiopian solidarity, and a strong desire for a common cause; even though, this has been refuted by the ethno-nationalist camp that asserts its history and in turn reveals discourses of subjugation, alienation, and the desire for emancipation (Mehretu, 2012; Tewodros, 2013).

The ethno-nationalist camp, which includes elites from Oromo, Somali, Sidama, Tigray, and other groups, denies the Ethiopian state's existence for centuries and the presence of a unified national identity. Instead, it argues that Ethiopia is an empire formed through Abyssinians' (northerners') territorial expansion in the late nineteenth century, with collaboration from European colonialists (Gudina, 2011; Jalata, 1998; Sorenson, 1992). Asafa Jalata (1998), an Oromo historian and nationalist, describes Ethiopia as a dependent colonizer. He claims that the Oromos are still victims of Ethiopian colonialism, which has deprived them of their 'right to national self-determination and democracy' (Jalata, 1998, p. x). The primary argument of ethno-nationalists, especially Oromos, is that modern Ethiopia was established in cooperation with European colonial powers by subjugating, enslaving, and colonizing previously independent or semi-independent political entities³ in the south alongside European colonizers (Hassen, 1990; Jalata, 1996, 1998; Markakis, 1989). Thus, this group provides an alternative narrative of oppression, conquest, difference, cultural uniqueness, and the struggle for the decolonization of conquered peoples (Lata, 1999; Sorenson, 1992).

The ethno-nationalists' argument is the antithesis of the existing Ethiopianist historiography and is considered an alien influence. Tibebe (2008) contends that the alien ideology of Marxism and its impact on the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) influenced the ethno-nationalists' reactionary zeal. He also argues that ethno-nationalist historians present a counter-discourse to the detriment of nationalist

historians who consider the emerging discourse anti-Ethiopian, revisionist, uncivilized, and desiring to dismember the hardly established historic Ethiopian state (Tibebu, 1995). Tesfaye (2019, p. 11) adamantly asserts that ethno-nationalists' actions and determination are interfering with the nation's historical continuity and harmony, hurting Ethiopia's national history, which pan-Ethiopianist historiography has referred to as a 'completed project' (Hussein, 2006; Zewde, 2000). The above two contradictory historical positions have not only been sources of discontent that obstructed national consensus on Ethiopia's history but also sowed seeds of suspicion that need current investigation and intervention.

4. Findings and analysis

This section presents the findings of the study based on the analysis of both primary and secondary sources. The findings are classified into two sections. The first section presents the different perspectives and problems of Ethiopian historiography. The second one presents the role, contribution, and solution of post-modernist historiography to the contested historiography of Ethiopia. In the first section, four perspectives are identified that contribute to a contradictory understanding and perspective of Ethiopian history and historiography. These are foreign writers' perspectives and problems, Ethiopianist perspectives and problems, ethno-nationalist perspectives and problems, and Ethiopian regimes' perspectives and problems.

4.1. Ethiopia's history and historiographical perspectives, contradictions, and problems

4.1.1. Foreign writers' perspectives and problems

Foreign writers have made important contributions to the development of Ethiopian historiography. These elements contributed a lot to reconstructing Ethiopia's history, but they have also, knowingly or unknowingly or because of different factors, contributed to the historiographical contradictions of Ethiopia. Ghebru Tareke argues that Ethiopia's history is corrupted by 'misconceptions and prejudices' partly as a result of foreign writers (Ghebru, 1979, p. 6). Ghebru argues that a full study and comprehension of contemporary Ethiopian government and politics necessitates an objective examination of Ethiopia's past and present reality (p. 7). A case in point, according to Ghebru, is the role of the famous sociologist Donald Levine,⁴ whose sociological work, 'Greater Ethiopia', is responsible for such 'misconceptions and prejudices' that misled and made us believe Ethiopia is an 'organic unit with its own characteristic features' (Ghebru, 1979, p. 7). The central argument of Ghebru in the context of the then and today's Ethiopia's reality is that the commonality and distinctive characteristic features of Ethiopia as claimed by Levine are too exaggerated and categorically deemphasized Ethiopia's ethnic, social, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity just 'to assert an Ethiopian nationhood'. (Ghebru, 1979, p. 7).

Donald Levine and his work have contributed to Ethiopia's historical contradictions. The pan-Ethiopianist and centrist historiography refer to Levine's work as problem-free historical and anthropological evidence. They use it to substantiate their argument while reconstructing and writing Ethiopia's history. In contrast, Christopher Clapham (2002) and John Markakis (2011) note the anthropological and ethnographic divide of Ethiopians. They contend that the northerners—Tigrayans and Amhara—have a history, whereas other peoples merely have an ethnography or a sub-national history that is eventually absorbed into the national historical narrative (Clapham, 2002, p. 40; Markakis, 2011, p. 21). Given this reality of Ethiopia's socio-cultural and historical divide; it would be problematic to uphold positivist meta-historical narratives or Ethiopian historicism while side-lining the others' contributions.

Foreign scholars and writers have also had a negative influence by degrading some ethnic groups in Ethiopia.⁵ In this respect, the term and appellation given to the Oromos by foreign and domestic scholars have been sources of discontent. Oromo nationalists and scholars argue that the Oromo ethnonym was intentionally obliterated from history and replaced by the derogatory name 'Galla',⁶ which connotes the Oromos being 'savage, slave, barbaric, inferior, uncultured, and ignorant' (Jalata, 1995, 1996; Sorenson, 1992; Tibebu, 1995) who needed the Amhara administration should they behave and be civilized within the northern socio-cultural setting (Gudina, 2003, p. 64; Jalata, 1995).

The effect of such naming and appellations, according to Oromo nationalists, is that it inculcated negative stereotypes and perceptions about the Oromos that prevented both Ethiopian and foreign

scholars, who subscribe to the Ethiopianist scholarship, from properly understanding Oromo history and culture and giving it due attention worthy of study as Ethiopia's popular history (Bulcha, 1997, pp. 338–339; Jalata, 1996, p. 97). Such developments have fuelled historical debate, while the centrists argue that the cultural past of the southern people should be subsumed under the cultural universalism of the north. Southerners, however, advocate for equality, inclusivity, and otherness in the context of Ethiopia's history (Ta'a, 2006).

4.1.2. Ethiopianist perspectives and problems: exclusionist and reductionist history

Ethiopian traditional writers made important contributions to Ethiopia's historiography. Court chroniclers, who were paid by the state or offered some rewards, wrote Ethiopian history in the past, focusing on political or elite history. This approach was reductionist and side-lined vital aspects. Historical events had to be written and interpreted from the perspective of the ruling elites, with religious or superstitious influences. These court writers often depicted the history of the 'victors'. Tibebu notes that the court historians of the 'Ge'ez culture' were skilled 'flatterers' of the ruling class and constantly praised the monarch. This is what Tibebu refers to as Ethiopia's 'historical essentialism' (Tibebu, 1995, p. xxiv, 13). Gebrehiwot Baykedagn, a twentieth-century Ethiopian intellectual who observed his contemporary historians, argued that the chroniclers tended to exaggerate minor achievements while neglecting significant milestones to please their sponsors and gain rewards in return (Gebrehiwot, 1912/1904 EC as cited in Ghebru, 1979, p. 10). In critiquing these historians, Gebrehiwot suggested a history-writing principle for future historians (lit. translated from Amharic). He said that:

History education benefits when it is true. It is not easy to write true history. We need to have the following three gifts of God: First, a spectacular conscience to understand what happened. Second, an impartial mind to judge what happened. Third, clear language to communicate what we have understood, observed, and judged. Ethiopian history writers, however, commit sins in these aspects. (Gebrehiwot, 1912/1904 EC, p. 336)

highlighting the impact of these paid palace chroniclers on modern Ethiopian history and historiography, Ghebru contends that Ethiopian professional historians have not departed from their predecessors' tradition, and the majority of them use the then chroniclers and chronicles as their point of reference in their historical writing and interpretation of Ethiopia's history (Ghebru, 1979, p. 10). As a result, Ethiopianist historiography has been selective and focuses on the victors' historical point of view while ignoring 'others' that affect historical authenticity. The Ethiopianist perspective has the following missing elements, which affect national unity and cohesion: These include marginalizing others, categorically the South or Kushites, diversity, regional dynamics, and social inequalities. These led to historical distortion and exclusive narrative, which have been observed to have detrimental effects on national unity and cohesion.

Throughout history, conquerors and hegemonies have written history, while losers have been forced to accept the terms and conditions of winners, as well as the so-called 'national history'. In this instance, the historical narrative would be selective and partial, and historical interpretation would be given a political painting that would be recognized as national history for generations to come. This has brought up the problem of victors' historical narrative syndrome and losers thereof. Regarding historical selectivity⁷ and interpretation,⁸ the famous historian Jan Vansina observes that:

Selectivity occurs mainly for social reasons. Some topics are worthwhile, others are not. Certain individuals or groups of people are interesting, others are not. The effects are loss of information and the creation of a profile of past history which is the historical consciousness of the present. (Vansina, 1985, p. 190)

Given the politicization of history writing, Ethiopia's history and historiography cannot be exceptional and avoid this reality. In Ethiopia, history and historical writing have had two main goals: legitimizing the political order, including the state, and portraying the history of a few as the history of the entire nation. Showcasing is the Ethio-nationalist historiography that hardly admits the existence of diversity and treats the periphery as an object of history that must be assimilated into the mainstream alias 'northern' history and culture, which serves as a 'melting-pot' of the Ethiopian state (Hailu, 2021, p. 39). Moreover, this approach tends to disregard any attempt to rectify incorrect historical interpretations or counter-historicity. In this regard, Awol (2013) argues that in Ethiopia, historical knowledge was established in an intrusive and totalizing manner, preventing counter-narratives from circulating in the social

body. In this setting, nationalist history, according to Sorenson, concentrates on the retrospective projection, which sees the national self as an 'enduring and permanent subject of history' rather than a result of change and continuity (Sorenson, 1992, p. 227). Awol also observes that the Ethiopianist perspective reveals itself in a refusal to acknowledge the voices of others (Awol, 2013).

Pietro Toggia (2008, p. 319) argues that Ethiopia's history has been written for meta-narrative consumption as an 'incontestable domain of knowledge, truth, legitimacy, and national identity,' with others subtly made silent and subsumed under the centre's grand historical discourses and the quest for legitimacy. So, why is Ethiopia's history an area of contestation between the pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist historiography? The answer is not found in the aforementioned protagonist camps but in Foucault's concept of the inseparability of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1980). Foucault argues that power is dispersed through social structures, institutions, and individual interactions in relation to knowledge, which interact with each other (1980, p. 51). He also argues that power/knowledge operates in the mechanisms of discipline and normalization to regulate and control the behaviour of others (1980, p. 61). Knowledge, on the other hand, is not neutral or objective but is shaped by the dynamics of power. Foucault argues, '...every relation of force implies at each moment a relation of power' (1980, p. 189). This, among other things, has contributed to the absence of widely held consensus regarding Ethiopia's national history.

Despite the criticism against Ethio-nationalists by ethno-nationalists, the former has expressed concern about the latter's intentions. The Ethio-nationalist elites argue that the ethno-nationalist camp harbours negative sentiments towards Ethiopia's state formation, history, and the development of a unified Ethiopian national identity and patriotism (Lata, 1999). This camp believes that the post-1991 EPRDF regime committed a double sin by creating a historicism and an ahistorical society that lacked a sense of history. Participant 'Kahsa' argued that both could contribute to the regime's agenda of dividing the country ethnically and eventually dismembering the Ethiopian state through ethnicised politics (December 12, 2022). Tesfaye (2019, p. 11) argues that ethno-nationalists are deliberately attempting to disrupt the historical continuity of Ethiopia and its history, with postmodernism providing the ideological foundation for the deconstruction of Ethiopia's history; therefore, it is 'the predicaments of the grand narrative of Ethiopian history'. For Mehretu (2017, p. 49), this constitutes the de-legitimization of the collective identity of Ethiopianism since the collapse of the Ethiopian monarchy in 1974 by Ethiopian left-leaning forces,⁹ which lacked historical facts or geographic intelligence on how countries evolved and became modern states.

4.1.3. *Ethno-nationalist perspectives and problems: deconstructionist historiography*

History lost is a history not sought

—Oromo Proverb

The ethno-nationalist historiography is the latest to join Ethiopia's historiographical debate. Participant 'Tekalign' argues that the ethno-nationalist historiography traced its existence during the Ethiopian Students Movement (ESM) when they raised the 'question of nationalities'. (December 9, 2022). The ethno-nationalist historiography has been opposing the pan-Ethiopian mainstream and positivist historiography (Tibebu, 1995, 2008). The former is officially referred to as the 'colonial school historiography', which unequivocally condemns Ethiopian historiography as a colonial myth and a fairy tale propagated to sustain the Ethiopian colonial empire (Hassen, 1990; Jalata, 1995; Tibebu, 1995). The ethno-nationalist camp made important progress following the Ethiopian revolution of 1974 and the coming of the EPRDF regime in 1991 where ethno-nationalist discourses predominate the national setting (Tibebu, 2008; Zewde, 2000).

Pietro Toggia (2008, p. 320) observes that the state's mainstream and ethno-nationalist historiographical discourses might be reciprocated by ethno-nationalist historiography, resistance, and struggle from the subaltern, which has no 'space even in the margins of [nationalist] history pages'. In this regard, Anthony Smith (1995, p. 16) contends that nationalists are 'social and political archaeologists' who actively engage in 'rediscovering and reinterpret[ing]' their past to regenerate¹⁰ their nationality. Accordingly, the ethnic past 'is composed of a series of traditions and memories which are the subject of constant reinterpretation' (1995,

p. 17) based on deliberate forgetting and reminiscence of the past (1995, p. 19). Tibebe (1995, p. xiii) asserts that, despite the ethno-nationalists' audacity and determination, Ethio-nationalist historiography is critical of ethno-nationalists' historiography because the latter challenges the former's hegemonic position since it legitimizes the Ethiopian state, its history, and the existing *status quo*.

The postmodern condition, which governs contemporary knowledge production, has influenced Ethiopia's historical study, writing, and interpretation. In this setting, the ethno-nationalist side is deconstructionist by nature, position, and objective. Participant 'Gamta', Oromo nationalist and politician, argues that ethno nationalist historiography seeks to expose Ethiopianist historiography that focuses on sustaining the unbalanced power relations between northerners and southerners manifested in marginalization, colonization, assimilation, and dominant knowledge production that sustains the hitherto power relations and hidden interests masked by Ethiopian state unity and historical continuity (January 16, 2023). Participant 'Sehale', Tigrayan nationalist, argues that the Amhara ruling elites used a 'fake Ethiopianist mask' to transform the Ethiopian empire state into a nation-state based on the socio-cultural ethos of the Shāwan ruling aristocratic class, which proved a failure since it failed to address diversity and was later challenged by the Ethiopian Students Movement (ESM), which brought a new state-building dispensation (December 12, 2022).

The ethno-nationalist camp presents evidence to support its allegations. For instance, Asafa Jalata (1996, p. 95) and Tesema Ta'a (2006) argue that the good cultural accomplishments of the southern peoples, especially the Oromos, are not acknowledged by Ethiopianist historiography. Mohammed Hassen (1990, p. 1) also contends that before being subjugated by Ethiopian colonialism, the Oromos had an 'independent existence as masters of their destiny and makers of their history'. Furthermore, he argues that Ethiopia's colonialism started in the 1880s, stripped Oromos of sovereignty and history that ended their separate existence, merely solidifying the long-held misconception that the Oromo are 'people without a history'. The Ethiopianist and modernist historiography, according to Yusuf (2009, p. 382), is fundamentally essentialist, with a focus on the core of northern Ethiopia, which serves as both the beginning and end of history and narrates the 'history of the south simply to complete the story'.

According to Jalata (1995, p. 165), Oromo nationalist discourse has opposed both the academic and Ethiopianist historical discourse that has relegated Oromo to an object of history by depicting them as a people without a history or civilization. He argues, 'Ethiopian nationalist discourse and Oromo nationalism contradict each other' (1995, p. 183). The manifestation is that Ethiopianist historiography considers 'the colonization of the Oromo as the reunification of Ethiopia' since Ethiopian territory was lost to the expansion of the Oromos during the Oromo people's movement during the sixteenth century (Haile, 1986, p. 465; Jalata, 1996, p. 100). However, the counter-discourse and new historicism¹¹ produced by the Oromo nationalists is that the Oromos have been under Ethiopian colonial rule since the era of Shāwan expansion that was culminated by Emperor Menelik (ca.1889–1913). Oromo nationalism, which still upholds the colonial thesis, calls for decolonization since the Ethiopian state cannot develop and democratize (Marzagora, 2017, p. 425).

Urgessa, ex-Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) political officer, argued that OLF struggles for the Oromo people's right to self-determination, and contends that Ethiopia and the northern cultural ethos are still imposed on the peoples of Ethiopia, particularly on the Oromos. He also argued that the oppressed peoples of Ethiopia need self-determination and decolonization, as well as the free will and decision to continue within the Ethiopian state (Gebeyanu, 2023). This assertion is synonymous with the concept that the Oromos are distinct from their historical and political contenders, technically known as the *habasha* (Amhara and Tigrayans) or Abyssinians, as claimed by the likes of Mohammed Hassen (1990), Jalata (1995), Lata (1999), Bulcha (1993), and other Oromo nationalist historians and political elites. Donald Levine, a pan-Ethiopianist scholar, also characterized the relationship between the Oromos and the Abyssinians as 'great historical antagonists' (Levine, 1974, p. 128).

Pan-Ethiopianist school refutes the colonial thesis. For example, Messay Kebede (2003, p. 12) challenges the assertions of Oromos and argues that Ethiopia, being a non-capitalist country, was unable to engage in colonial ventures. Tewodros (2013, p. 32) argues that the colonial school is disproportionately represented by hardliner Oromo nationalists and a few expatriate scholars who hold the wrong premise and conclusion that modern Ethiopia is an 'invention of the Abyssinian core' (Amhara-Tigre coalition) that

have always been separate from the southerners historically, politically, and culturally and that the latter need political and cultural decolonization. He further argues that supporting the colonial historiography would be tantamount to endorsing any effort to decolonize their history, which can only be accomplished by physical, economic, political, and psychological decolonization. Concessions or compromises to the demands of ethno-nationalism by the centrist mean losing the real 'essence and endangering the ideal of cultural authenticity'. (Sorenson, 1992, pp. 239–40).

Larebo (2019) discredits such arguments as an assault on Ethiopian history and one of the historical distortions of ethno-nationalism for mere political consumption. He argues that Ethiopia, with three thousand years of existence, has experienced internal and external conflicts, with the strong subduing the weak, which other countries have seen in their state-building experience. Furthermore, he contends that Ethiopia cannot be accused of colonialism because it reunified its lands lost to the Oromos during their northward expansion, as well as during the *Zämänä Mäsafänt* (lit. era of princes), when the political centre was weak. According to Haile, Ethiopia's geographical reacquisition of its former territories was critical in saving the people from the savagery of European colonizers and the *Gädaa* system reflected Oromo barbarism.

The Oromos practiced the *Gädaa* system, a traditional democratic socio-political system with egalitarian principles, participatory decision-making, and checks and balances to prevent excessive power accumulation (Berisso, 2018). The Oromo elites emphasize the positive aspects and achievements of the *Gädaa* system, even before the introduction of Western-type liberal democracy. However, pan-Ethiopianist scholars and their historiography have challenged the position of the Oromo elites. Achamyeleh and Habtamu argue that the *Gädaa* system was harsh and barbaric when it came to encountering and treating non-Oromos (Reyot Media, 2020). Habtamu argues that the *Gädaa* system, allegedly democratic by Oromo elites, is not truly democratic, as it involved violent and inhumane assimilation of non-Oromos, forcing indigenous Ethiopians to accept Oromo culture and accept the fathers of the Oromos as their fathers or face harsh measures (Reyot Media, 2020).

Achamyeleh argues that it was the Oromo expansion that must assume responsibility for the current problem and lack of peace in the country. He further argues that during the Oromo expansion, mass atrocities and human rights violations were committed, which led to the extinction and assimilation of around twenty-eight indigenous ethnicities during the Oromos' northward expansion. He concludes that the *Abba Gädaas* (fathers) of Oromo should recognize and ask for forgiveness from the Ethiopian people for the destruction they brought through the institutionalization of the culture of violence by the *Gädaa* system (Reyot Media, 2020). Kebede argues that the incorporation of the Oromo elites into Ethiopian polity had rather a destructive and retarding consequence during the *zämänä mäsafänt*, which the Oromo elites intentionally ignored. He further argues that the net effect of the Oromo elites' intrusion and destruction led to 'political anarchy', which lost Ethiopia the advantage of the industrial revolution in Europe (Kebede, 2003, p. 14).

According to participant 'Tekalign' the ethno-nationalists have two agendas. First, the southerners - Oromos, Sidama, Welayta, Somalis, and others - depict Ethiopia as 'a black colonizer' and attempt to justify their resistance by highlighting the Abyssinians (Amhara and Tigrayans) dominating others. Particularly, they pinpoint the history of exploitation and underdevelopment under the 'Amhara-dominated' state formation and nation-building process. Secondly, some of the northerners - who were expected to uphold the country's history - 'use and abuse' or exploit the nation's history to seize and maintain political power. A case in point is how the TPLF exploited the nation's history to gain political legitimacy by exposing the wrongdoings of the past (December 9, 2022). Another participant 'Getachew' confirmed that the TPLF manipulated and abused the nation's past for power and dominance. He emphasized that all contenders for power abuse history (January 5, 2023).

4.1.4. Ethiopian regimes perspectives and problems

Because history is so important in Ethiopian politics and government, successive Ethiopian regimes have attempted to use it to boost their legitimacy or maintain the status quo. Sorenson (1992, p. 227) contends that the Ethiopian state is one of three players with competing narratives of Ethiopia's history. According to Zewde (1994), the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the state have always kept a careful check on

Ethiopian historians. Accordingly, three ideological constructs have been demanded of them: the Queen of Sheba's tale (up to 1974), the sanctity of Ethiopia's unity (1974–1991), and the disintegration of that unity (after 1991). This is a good manifestation of how the state or the regime has had an impact on Ethiopia's historiography (Zewde, 2000). As a result, Ethiopia's established historiography underwent considerable modifications following the two successive regime changes in 1974 and 1991. First, the 1974 popular revolution 'dismantled the legitimacy' of pre-revolutionary history and replaced it with a new perspective dictated by the 'doctrine of Marxism', which sees the masses as the makers and subjects of history. Second, the regime change in 1991 weakened the 'hegemony' of the pre-1974 historiography (Zewde, 2000, p. 4).

The *Därg* regime (1974–1991) and Marxist historical inquiry and perspectives influenced post-revolution Ethiopia's historiographical scene. Participant 'Tekalign' noted that the new historiographical inquiry focused on highlighting societal inequality, exploitation, resistance, class struggle, land reform made by the military junta, and the role of peasants and workers in shaping Ethiopian history (December 9, 2022). According to Zewde, the revolutionary regime saw the pre-revolutionary period as 'reactionary' and unworthy of historical research to establish Marxism and create a socialist personality. However, due to both internal and external challenges, it was thought important to trace former empire builders and Ethiopia's ancient history, except for Haile Selassie I (r. 1916–1935, 1941–1974), who was viewed as a reactionary and authoritarian leader (Zewde, 2000, p. 4). Secondly, the regime change in 1991 led to the field's liberation for a short period, with 'free investigation and dissemination of the past'. (Zewde, 2000, pp. 4–5). However, ethnicity since then has become a day-to-day action in historical teaching and study, culminating in confrontation and accusations between ethno-nationalist historians and pan-Ethiopianists (Zewde, 2000, pp. 4–5; participant 'Tekalign', December 9, 2022).

According to participant 'Sehale', the EPRDF regime, in its attempt to rebuild Ethiopia, has significantly influenced the reinterpretation of Ethiopia's past, challenging nationalist historians (December 12, 2022). The regime's incorporation of ethnicity into the Ethiopian political lexicon has been a success for ethno-nationalists, who counter centralist, assimilationist, and Ethiopianist historiography (Marzagora, 2017, p. 440). The unrestricted state autonomy has led to state-centered institutions and analyses that serve their ideology and values of social transformation (Boone, 2003, p. 16). Christopher Clapham argues that history should not be altered to support regime agendas and that the state may be interested in demonstrating the origins of political organization, legitimization, and grandeur (2002, p. 38). This highlights that Ethiopian history has become an instrument for state formation, nation building, and indoctrination, a challenge that Ethiopian history and historiography cannot avoid.

The EPRDF regime banned 'Introduction to History of Ethiopia and the Horn' from the university common course because it was a source of contradiction. The justification stated for the suspension was that the history material contained plenty of prejudice, discrimination, and inequality, which effectively supported and perpetuated the pre-1991 centrist socio-political order that legitimized the previous system. It was only recently that history education was reinstated in Ethiopian universities as a common course following the adoption of the new education roadmap by the reformist government, which came in March 2018. However, some still have reservations and concerns about the contents and objectives of this university history education. Participant 'Sebhatu', from Tigray, argues that the history course was reinstated for only political consumption and appeasing pan-Ethiopianist forces but not for state-building, and still there is disagreement on some of its contents (October 19, 2023). This shows that the history module and contents are still contested and politicized, particularly by the Northerners or Semites, since the module favours the Southerners and Cushites.

4.2. Postmodernist approach and solution to contested historiography of Ethiopia

Postmodernism, as the prevailing condition in knowledge production, challenges mainstream positivist meta-narratives. It offers a unique perspective on contested historiography (Susen, 2015). Hegemonic power relations, internally embedded biases, and conflicting perspectives often influence Ethiopia's historical interpretations. In such a situation, postmodernism plays an important role in deconstructing unbalanced power relations.

This article argues that a postmodern historiographical approach best serves to handle the historical contradictions of the Ethiopian state. Even though some Ethiopian historians have rejected and criticized

postmodernism's methods for reconstructing history, particularly in a multinational setting and in a socially and politically divided state (See Tesfaye, 2019), still some historians deviate from the mainstream positivistic Rankean historiography and argue that postmodernism has critique and policy implications for the benefit and improvement of historiography and the discipline itself. White (2009, p. 86) comments that discontent with traditional scientific history's (modernism or positivism) incompetence or unwillingness to cope with 'extreme' events connected with authoritarian regimes gave rise to postmodernism as historiography. Similarly, Yilmaz (2010, p. 785) asserts that postmodernism, as a historiographical approach, provides a fundamental epistemological critique and challenges the discipline of history by questioning historians' means of knowing the past. According to Evans (1999, p. 214), postmodernism has pushed historians to scrutinize materials more closely, to take their appearance more seriously, and to think about texts and narratives in new ways. Evans also notes that:

Postmodernism in its more moderate guises has thus helped open up many new subjects and areas for research while putting back on the agenda many topics [that] had previously seemed to be exhausted. It has forced historians to interrogate their [...] methods and procedures as never before, and in the process has made them more self-critical and self-reflexive (Evans, 1999, p. 216).

Keith Jenkins (1997, p. 16) argues that the traditional and centrist historiographical approach represents the dominant elitist political history, aiming to maintain and satisfy the mainstream and prevailing national historical discourse and social orders by overlooking the histories of 'others' as not histories at all but as fakes. Thompson (2004) argues that some of the postmodernist theories and practices of history, such as the examination of the rhetoric and discourse of a writer, recognition of the voices of the silenced or ignored, and identification of coercive power relationships, can not only strengthen historical understanding but also broaden the vocabulary of the discipline.

According to Zagorin (1999), the postmodernist critique of history urged historians to reflect on the nature of history as a discipline, showed innovative ways to read texts, and helped expand the subjects of historical inquiry by including those people ignored or overlooked by earlier generations of historians. Southgate (2009, p. 542) also notes that through postmodern historical writing, a wide variety of alternative and equally persuasive narratives may be presented in their own right, representing those who had been previously ignored, excluded, or, at best, perceived and included as 'subaltern', 'inferior', and 'others'. Finally, postmodernism's contribution to the discipline of history or historical writing can be summarised by Peter Burke's distinction between 'old history' vs. 'new history' or 'historicism' vs. 'new historicism'. Accordingly, 'old history' focuses on political history, which essentially focuses on the state at the national and international level rather than the subaltern as its main concern. The 'old history' also includes some institutions, like the history of the church and the military, which is the 'continuation of politics by other means'. In contrast, 'new historicism' is concerned with every human activity based on the assertion that 'everything has a story' that helps expand the scope and topic of historical writing and research beyond the traditional alias 'old history' of elitism to the social and cultural analysis of ordinary citizens (Burke, 2001, p. 3).

5. Discussion

5.1. *Postmodernist critique of Ethiopian history and historiography*

The postmodernist approach in Ethiopian historiography exposes the power dynamics that have shaped dominant historical narratives, often perpetuating the interests of certain groups at the expense of marginalized sections of society. This approach challenges the idea of a singular, objective truth and emphasizes the role of subjectivity and interpretation in constructing historical narratives (Susen, 2015). Postmodernist historiography in Ethiopian history contributes to critically examining sources, biases, and silenced voices within historical accounts, questioning often unquestioned assumptions that have shaped our understanding of Ethiopia's past. This approach can rectify historical injustices and provide a more inclusive praxis, contributing to the study of Ethiopia's historical complexities and representation of marginalized communities.

As evidenced by the ethno-nationalists' argument and the adamant response of Ethiopianist scholarship, the previously elitist and essentialist modernist Ethiopian historiography primarily focuses on the political

history of the dominant Semitic groups of the north and neglects the social, economic, and cultural aspects and contributions of Ethiopian nations and nationalities as noted by Duressa and Geleta (2021), Ta'a (2006), and Yusuf (2009). This single approach and narrow focus resulted in a distorted and incomplete understanding of Ethiopian history, becoming a source of historiographical contradiction. The richness and diversity of Ethiopian experiences cannot be captured in a single modernist and linear narrative. Instead, we must strive for multiple perspectives, contextual understanding, and the inclusion of voices from diverse social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds through a postmodernist historiographical approach.

Moreover, the postmodernist critique highlights the need for a more inclusive and pluralistic approach to Ethiopian historiography. Historians should be aware of the biases, ideologies, power relations, and dominances embedded in society within the production of knowledge, which, according to Foucault (1980, pp. 51–52), will never be free from power relations. As Marc Ferro (2003, p. 171) notes, history and historical narratives can be manipulated to serve political or nationalistic agendas and presented in educational settings full of biases and distortions by 'selections of detail, omissions, additions, and new interpretations'. In the case of Ethiopia, selective history and historical narrations have been serving as the repository of power through various institutions and practices.

A case in point presented by Tigrayan nationalists is the deliberate weakening of the Tigray nation in collaboration with Italian and British colonial forces, resulting in the division of the Tigrayan peoples into two—Eritrea and Ethiopia—so that they do not challenge the hegemony of Amhara and colonialist forces in the region. Ceding the *Bahrä Nāgash*-viceroys of the sea province to be an Italian colony has been the source of stiff resentment and discontent among Tigray elites who argue that this was done intentionally to divide and weaken Tigray-core province of imperial Ethiopia. Participants 'Mehari' and 'Abreha', Tigrayan elites, argue that such historical facts and interpretations are muted in the Ethiopianist discourse (October 19, 2023). This has been the bone of contention between Amhara and Tigrayan elites. However, by expanding the horizons and perspectives of historiographical research and incorporating others' experiences and practices, Ethiopian historiography can provide a more comprehensive understanding, which contributes to national cohesion. The ethno-nationalist challenge of Ethiopianist historiography and their call for the reinterpretation of Ethiopia's history through a postmodernist and deconstructionist approach coincides with what Susen (2015) characterizes as the broader transformative movement in historiographical thinking and approach, using postmodernism as a tool to expose the limitations of teleological tailored singular and objective narratives.

Foreign writers have played and continue to play a crucial role in Ethiopia's historical writing and historiography, providing new perspectives and alternative interpretations. It is essential to recognize the contributions of foreign writers to Ethiopia's historiographical development. They can challenge entrenched narratives and broaden the scope of analysis from a neutral perspective. However, it is essential to be aware of potential cultural biases when examining the histories of socially and politically divided societies. In Ethiopia, some foreign scholars have contributed to such biases. To avoid these issues, foreign writers should be sensitive to local contexts, engage with local scholars, and actively understand society's issues. Collaboration, dialogue, and triangulation with local scholars can foster a mutual exchange of knowledge and perspectives, deepening our understanding of Ethiopia's complex historical events and socio-political foundations.

Postmodernist critique of Ethiopia's history and historiography highlights the unrealistic focus on the high politics of the state history, which according to Tibebe (1995), ethno-nationalist elites and their historiography do not agree on. They argued that the objective reality of Ethiopia's multi-ethnic and pluralistic society makes insisting on a modernist approach unrealistic. Moreover, modernist and Ethiopianist historiography focuses on historical continuity and objectivity, while ethno-nationalist historiography adopts a deconstructionist approach. This approach aims to reinterpret Ethiopia's history, criticizing Ethiopianist historiography, and advocating for new historicism. Ethno-nationalism's historiography reflects de colonial sentiment and asserts indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination, highlighting the need for a new relationship and emancipation.

The ethno-nationalism's call for new historicism, which focuses on new elements of history writing based on refocused subjects of history, time, space, geography, and local culture as opposed to old Ethiopian historicism, is indicative of the extent to which Ethiopia's history and historiography are contested terrains. Participant 'Getachew' argued that the effect is a quandary for Ethiopia's state-building, national reconciliation, and cohesion, as well as the absence of consensus and sympathy for others. However, the reality is that Ethiopians are condemned to live together; they have commonalities and cannot move forward

without a common history (January 5, 2023). This calls for a critical re-examination and deconstruction of Ethiopia's past to give a new perspective and interpretation through the prism of change and continuity.

Ethiopia's historical controversy and state-building impasse can be resolved by rethinking modernist historiography and focusing on the 'subaltern' perspective. This approach aims to transform conflict through the accommodation of the 'other', leading to reconciliation, consensus, and national cohesion. Postmodern historiography eliminates centre-periphery distinctions and broadens historiographical inquiry. By shifting elite and politically tailored history writing to mass-based cultural and social history, postmodernist historiography can alleviate Ethiopia's history breakage and historiographical debate, focusing on marginalized sections of society that have been overlooked in the country's history books.

While capitalizing on the contributions of postmodernism for historical reinterpretation, it should also be noted that postmodernism has some drawbacks. Its emphasis on subjectivity and deconstruction undermines the pursuit of objective truth and meaning in historical reconstruction. Moreover, it should also be noted that postmodernist and deconstructionist historiography, which calls for the inclusion and accommodation of the history of the 'other', could be used and abused for some hegemonic aspirations. Hence, it is hardly taken for granted as a problem-free historical approach and investigation.

Postmodernist and deconstructionist historiography involve the production of knowledge that serves as 'part of social institutions' (Panneerselvam, 2018, p. 227), allowing knowledge producers to shape their interpretation of the past and incorporate diverse perspectives aiming to bring equality in disguise; however, hegemony. This can lead to another 'contradiction', as Hegel's term suggests, and a social and political movement for emancipation. Rehbein (2018, p. 49) argues that inequality in knowledge production is more fundamental than economic and other types, challenging critical theory's assertion that inequality is embedded in the uneven distribution of means of production. Finally, it has been demonstrated that in Ethiopia, history is contested by Ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist schools, leading to polarized and politicized discourses, and a lack of consensus on the country's national history. This political-historical entanglement is further complicated by elite-based political contradictions between ethno-nationalists and pan-Ethiopianists. The former demands historical deconstruction and decolonization, and the latter securitize Ethiopia's unity, continuity, and history, considering it as the 'referent object' according to the Copenhagen school of securitization. These competing historiographical positions and debates are continually informed by Ethio-nationalist and ethno nationalism historiographical perspectives, further complicating Ethiopia's complexities.

6. Recommendations

6.1. Postmodernist historiography and policy implications for national cohesion

Postmodernist historiography plays a crucial role in integrating diversity and inclusion into shared national history and culture. Ethiopia, a multi-ethnic country with over 80 ethnic groups, requires a shared historical narrative and cultural heritage to maintain national cohesion. This requires recognizing and celebrating shared historical figures and contributions by Ethiopian societies. Despite political and ideological issues, Ethiopia's elites and policymakers must recognize that the country is a result of past state formation dynamics, which have contributed to its contemporary state with its thesis and antithesis. This requires an accommodative history to reconcile contradictory historical issues. The research emphasizes the importance of consensus on a country's history and future for sustainable and democratic state-building and national cohesion. However, the absence of a commonly held national history has led to contradictions and challenges in Ethiopia's quest for reconciliation. To maintain unity and cohesion, a commonly held and inclusive national history is crucial. The research recommends the establishment of Ethiopia's Historical Commission to address this issue and prevent political uncertainty. This approach will help maintain a sense of national unity and cohesion in Ethiopia.

6.1.1. The need for the establishment of Ethiopia's Historical Commission (EHC)

One of the solutions to Ethiopia's historical controversy is to liberate Ethiopia's history from its conquerors, both Ethio-nationalist and ethno-nationalist. The Ethiopian Historical Commission (EHC) is a crucial

institution aimed at liberating Ethiopia's history. The EHC would serve as a centralized institution for the comprehensive study, documentation, and interpretation of Ethiopia's history, challenging prevailing narratives that perpetuate inequality and marginalization. Its holistic approach would provide a solid foundation for understanding Ethiopia's diverse cultures, peoples, contributions, and historical events, fostering national consensus and cohesion. The EHC would include educators, politicians, historians, religious leaders, and other trusted personalities. It would also investigate contentious historical topics, facilitate national dialogue, and correct erroneous parts of Ethiopia's history. The aim is to create an inclusive history that fosters national cohesion, respect, and recognition of others.

7. Conclusion

The article has examined historical and historiographical interpretations in Ethiopia, highlighting biases and differing perspectives between pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist camps. It aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the root cause of this contradiction and to explore the policy implications of postmodernist historiography for national cohesion. The article emphasized the need for a critical examination of different historical perspectives to understand this complex historical contradiction.

Ethiopia's history has not been written in a way we learn from it; rather it has been source of biases, selective interpretation, leading to resentment and victimhood mentality. Ethiopia's lopsided historiographical perspectives are influenced by foreign writers, Ethiopianists, ethno-nationalists, and Ethiopian regimes. These perspectives can be categorized into pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist schools. Ethiopianist historiography has a political agenda and comfort zone that marginalizes and suppresses contributions, voices, and perspectives of the periphery, exposing fault lines in modernist and positivist approaches regarding historical objectivity and selectivity. Ethno-nationalist elites challenge this position, advocating for a new historical interpretation to reconstruct a more inclusive national history. The study aimed at analysing positivist and essentialist perspectives and proposed a postmodernist historiographical approach as a solution to Ethiopia's call for historical inclusivity, objectivity, and continuity.

Postmodernist critique has significant policy implications for Ethiopia's history and challenges the singular narrative of the past based on a particular geographic location and value systems due to Ethiopia's diversity and the urge to accommodate others' contributions. It was learned that Ethiopia's historiographical debate and controversy are caused by varying interpretations of the country's territorial expansion, resulting in contradictions between pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist historiographies. This has led to a lack of common national history, significantly affecting national cohesion. Postmodernist historiography can help address this impasse by providing a more comprehensive understanding of Ethiopia's history by accommodating the perspectives of the other. This is the salient feature of this study that locates the significance and contribution of postmodernist historiography, with all its limitations, to Ethiopia's historiographical impasse.

The paper emphasized the importance of historical reinterpretation to create a national and inclusive history in Ethiopia. It suggested deconstructing Ethiopia's historical narratives and rewriting Ethiopia's history to include otherness and inclusivity. The article suggested postmodern historiography as the foundation for a new discourse on national history, promoting sustainable state-building, reconciliation, and cohesion. It recommended the establishment of the Ethiopian Historical Commission (EHC) to critically examine existing narratives using postmodernist methodologies. EHC can create a comprehensive national history that promotes national cohesion, fostering unity and shared Ethiopian identity by embracing inclusivity, promoting dialogue, and addressing historical injustices.

Finally, the article argued that national historical reconciliation in Ethiopia is impossible, if not difficult, if the modernist meta-narrative continues to dominate the country's historiographical scene. It suggested that consensus and reconciliation on Ethiopian history are necessary for a common national history. Therefore, postmodernist historiography, which focuses on a new understanding of Ethiopian history, can help achieve this by engaging in meaningful dialogue and crafting policies that promote unity, inclusivity, and social cohesion through a discursive approach and new historicism.

The study has several limitations, including data accessibility, potential personal bias, and lack of representation and inclusivity. The research was based on intentionally selected elite interviews and secondary sources, which may have missed perspectives from other Ethiopian elites. The study's generalizability and context-specificity issues require caution when generalizing the problem,

methodology, findings, and recommendations to other countries and contexts. The study's political sensitivity and deep entrenchedness within Ethiopia's ethnicized politics may lead to further polarization interpretations and reinterpretation, making the proposed solutions impractical. Future research could focus on identifying effective strategies for the practicability of the recommended solutions. The study also highlights the potential misuse of post-modernist historiographical inquiry in Ethiopia, potentially triggering controversy and mistrust.

Notes

1. See "26 Gandhian Quotes Of Hind Swaraj" Available at quotes-of-hind-swaraj/.
2. The origin of Ethiopian history is a contentious issue, as Tibebe dubs it "Ethiopian history is as old as one wants it to be." See Teshale Tibebe (1995). *The Making of Modern Ethiopia...*, p. xi.
3. The colonial thesis, according to Oromo elites, argues that European powers allowed Ethiopia to remain independent and consolidated due to their inability to dominate the region. See Bonnie Holcomb & Sisai Ibssa (1990), "The Invention of Ethiopia" Paul Henze also argues that European powers, which threatened Ethiopia's survival, have stopped expanding their territories and checked each other. See Henze (2000), "Layers of Time," p. 192.
4. Donald Nathan Levine (1931–2015), an Ethiopianist sociologist, wrote "Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multi-ethnic Society" (1974, 2000), highlighting the Amhara's role in the establishment of the Ethiopian Empire.
5. Edward Ullendorff posited that Ethiopia's civilization is primarily attributed to the Monophysite Christian Abyssinians, specifically the Amhara and Tigrayans, who are the sole bearers of Ethiopian civilization. See Ullendorff (1960), *The Ethiopians*, pp. 111-112.
6. In both Ethiopian mainstream intellectual parlance and popular encounters, the appellation "Galla" carries discursive connotations of race, slavery, and barbarism that necessitated "Amharisation to civilize them" (Levine, 1986, p. 130, as cited in Asafa Jalata, 1996, p. 98).
7. It involves discarding some of one's past knowledge and keeping only relevant ones (see Vansina, *Oral tradition ...*, 1985.p.191).
8. This involves changing historical material to give it new meaning. Vansina contends that as interpretation is more creative than selection, it is also riskier (p. 191).
9. These include EPLF, TPLF, EPRP, OLF, ONLF, etc. The first two managed to lead their struggles to victory and became governments in Eritrea and Ethiopia, respectively.
10. It entails rallying the community, mobilising its members, tapping into collective emotions, inspiring moral fervour, and activating their energies for national objectives and rebirth (Smith, 1995, p. 16).
11. New historicism is a postmodernist approach that opposes historicism. Historicism, according to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, is the belief that man has little influence over history and advocates a value-free study of history. It emphasizes historical objectivism. Thus, new historicism is the antithesis of old historicism.

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